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CHAPTER XXXVII.

OF THE ASSAULT, AND THE MEASURES PRECEDING IT.

HIGHLY to be admired are the anxious precautions with which they precede an attack. They minutely premeditate whatever is likely to befall them. That they may not be deceived in their opinions, they make one of their jugglers the ruler of the expedition, whom, as endued with the knowledge of things future and absent, they consult on all occasions, and, madly credulous, revere as the Delphic Apollo. Should the event prove contrary to the juggler's predictions, not one of them will blame or even distrust him. Though he were to commit blunders every day, he would still carry home a considerable portion of the spoils, the reward of his mendacity. If an attack is to be made next day, they contemplate the situation of affairs in every point of view, nor ever apply their minds to the execution of a project, till convinced of its being devoid of danger. They leave the drove of superfluous horses with persons to guard them, in a place out of sight. They stain their faces with various colours, to excite ter-

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ber of drummers and trumpeters at a distance behind, pretend that they are only the part of a company that is to come after; or putting Spanish dresses on some of their men, make it appear as if they had Spanish soldiers at hand to give them aid. Misled by these artifices, the enemies not unfrequently give up their intention of fighting, and make the best of their way back again. Often, however, no opportunity is left them for stratagems. Compelled by a sudden inroad of the enemy, or allured by confidence of victory to resolve upon a combat, a piece of ground opposite the approaching enemy, and near the horde, is selected for the purpose, that they may be near their wives and children should they be in danger. Heralds are sometimes sent forward by the enemy to explain the causes of the war, and challenge the inhabitants to fight. But the bellowing of drums and trumpets, and horrid vociferations, are generally the only answer they obtain. Every thing preceding and accompanying a battle, is a spectacle worthy to be seen, and laughed at by Europeans. About the beginning of the conflict you may see jugglers mounted on horseback, who, making ridiculous gestures, and whirling round palm boughs in their hands, utter the direst imprecations on the hostile army: whilst old female

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726 jugglers are observed crawling on the ground, or
• [79] leaping in the streets, and with sullen eyes and
a hoarse voice, uttering some omen or curse.
[711] You may see the Abipones with their faces
stained, with many-coloured feathers in their
heads, and arms in their hands, some wearing
breastplates, others entirely naked, enter the
field with a marching gait, and appearing to
threaten the whole world. You may see
mountains in labour bring forth ridiculous mice.
These heroes, when placed in order of battle,
[802] wish to be counted by the Father, as they can-
not count themselves. As I walked up and down
the ranks, I was frequently asked, "Are we
many?" to which I constantly replied, "You
are very many;" lest they should be disheart-
ened at their want of numbers. Experience
taught me that the towns were mostly attacked
by a numerous enemy when very few of
the inhabitants were left at home—the rest
being dispersed far and wide for the sake of
hunting. The sagacious savages make the
assault when they have learnt from their spies
that the colony is bare of defenders. They
form themselves into a square, if the place will
admit of it. I observed that they sometimes
placed the archers in the midst, and the spear-
men on each wing; at others, the archers and
spearmen ranged themselves promiscuously.

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726 are unwilling, by a doubtful contest, to experience a change of fortune, and to undergo a new danger. A spear, or garment, taken from them in battle by their enemies, the Abipones consider a terrible disgrace to their nation, regarding the loss of it with as much grief as Europeans do that of their drums or standards.

756 The Abipones never attribute victories, and the fortunate events of battles, to their own skill,
• 791 but to the arts of their jugglers. Although
186 they hold the other Paraguayrian nations in contempt, yet they allow the Guaycurùs to be formidable; they say that they are cut down like funguses by the spears of these savages, not because they excel them in goodness of arms, strength of body, or courage of mind, but because they enter the fight attended by far more skilful jugglers. The Cacique Alaykin affirmed to me, that persons blown upon by their breath fell to the ground, as if struck with thunder.

727 But now let us contemplate the Abipones triumphing after a successful fight. If the event has answered to their wishes they fill the country with joyful rumours of victory, and generally exaggerated accounts of the slaughter of the enemy. They who have behaved with distinguished valour have the ears and eyes of all directed towards them. They who have re-

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coals, and, that the heat and smoke may be the more intolerable, the poor wretches are completely overwhelmed with palm leaves. They anoint the whole of the body of others with honey, tie them to a tree, and expose them to the stings of bees, wasps, drones, and hornets. But let me now return to the Abipon who is fasting and keeping silence at home. On the evening preceding this military function all the women flock to the threshold of his tent. Pulling off their clothes from the shoulder to the middle, and dishevelling their hair, they stand in a long row, and with confused shouts, accompanied with the sound of gourds, and with the continual agitation of their arms and legs, lament for the ancestors of him, who is, next day, to be adorned with a military dignity. These lamentations continue till it is dark. As soon as morning dawns, our candidate, elegantly dressed in the fashion of his nation, and holding a spear in his hand, leaps upon a horse laden with feathers, small bells, and trappings, and gallops northward, followed by a great troop of Abipones. Presently, returning with equal speed, he approaches the tent, where sits an old female juggler, the priestess of the ceremonies, who is afterwards to inaugurate the candidate with solemn rites. Some woman of noble birth officiously holds his spear and the bridles of his